

A New Discussion – with Kain Tapper

Riika Vepsä-Tapper



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The Sculpture *A New Discussion*, Vega – Norway 1992

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Editor's Note

Márcia Nascimento
& Nuno Costa

This issue is dedicated to a set of three sculptures by the legendary Finnish sculptor Kain Tapper entitled *A New Discussion* made in 1992 for the Norwegian island of Vega. They are located along the Route 839 near the bridge that connect this island with the neighboring island of Igerøya.

Vega has one of the most important sets of archaeological remains dating back to Stone Age, the first occupants of the island some 10,000 years ago. It is difficult to disconnect the circumstance of this place with the work of Kain Tapper. For the production of this set of sculptures, Kain Tapper sought to know the island, its dynamics, its primitive foundation. The deep understanding of the place allowed him to produce a work fully integrated into the island. The sculptures are now kind of contemporary remains that are diluted in the remains of the primitive man already diluted in nature itself, *discussing* with each other and forming a single, indivisible whole in continuous transformation.

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Map of Vega. Location of the sculptures *A New Discussion*.

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– The sculpture *A New Discussion*, Vega – Norway, 1992

Riika Vepsä-Tapper,
Curator, Writer ¹

The sea around Vega is vast and impressive. For those who are out in a small boat, a Stone Age fisherman, for example, safety is imperative. He must understand the wind, the waves and the currents. It is always difficult to approach the land from the sea. Kain wanted to feel these things for himself.

– We didn't know many people there, so each evening I went fishing with Jake (the artist Jarmo Saarekas) as someone had lent us a rather strange rowing boat. The boat was large and heavy, with rowlocks made of rope. It was strangely easy to manoeuvre and to row. We fished, but lost the entire catch. We sent greetings to the other free fish. Once we were carried far out to sea by a strong current; almost at once a strong wind blew up that allowed to reach land again.

Kain's life has shown me that the rhythm of an oarsman and the rhythm of a sculptor are closely related to one another. Without rhythm there is no music. The rhythm of the oarsman and the rhythm of the many inner tensions in *A New Discussion* have something in common – the relationship between the different elements of the work are important.

We are looking at the rhythm between three elements here

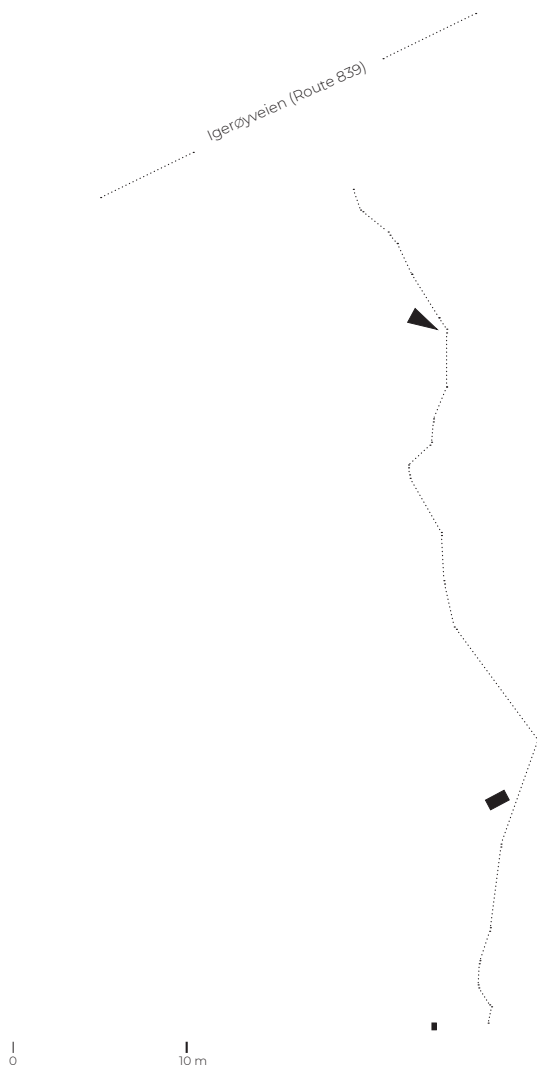
– there is no fourth element here, says Kain.

– Three is a sacred number for most people who are interested in nature, like the Etruscans for example. Other sacred numbers are seven, nine and twelve, or those are the ones I recall. At sea, every seventh wave is larger than the others. These rhythms are also found in nature. In many cultures, the number four is the symbol of life and re-incarnation.

– Nature itself is the fourth element, says Kain.

A New Discussion has been installed near by a natural harbour. I first became acquainted with the work in 1995, when the three elements were moved to the same side of a new road which had

¹ Riika Vepsä-Tapper was Kain Tapper wife (1993–2004).



Location of the three sculptures (GPS:65.673302, 12.03215)

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been built after the sculpture was inaugurated. The plan was to build a new leisure area in the same location, a picnic area for boaters and hikers. One of the elements of the sculpture group had been left standing alone on the opposite side of the road. People were running across the road from one element to the other, because they wanted to see them at close hand and touch them. This new road created an element of risk for pedestrians.

Kain was pleased that people wanted to touch the sculptures. Sculpture should be touched. By touching them, one understands the form better. In addition to rhythm, form is essential to art. Even those who are blind can "see" a sculpture.

When Kain grew up in mid-Finland during the war, hunting, fishing and collecting wild plants and fruits were the most important occupations in order to survive. According to family history, in the 18th century the Tapper family chose to make their home by a river with rapids. It was an area of extraordinary natural beauty which lay between woods and mountains. The landscape that surrounds *A New Discussion* is also extremely varied. Mountains and valleys, The Atlantic Ocean, an arctic wind, and areas covered by heather.

– Lots of birds, amazing flocks of ducks and even sea eagles. Nature is bountiful. In the middle of the sea lies this extraordinary, unforgettable impression of a place, recalls Kain.

Kain used three archaic forms as his challenging point of departure.

– These forms are characteristic of your work, even though they have been changed during the process: here is a triangle, here a square and here a vertical form. The triangular element has the same basis of departure and theme as another of your sculptures: Surely a Horses Head. Over the years it has been reduced from a true likeness of a horses head, to an abstract, sharply edged skull form.

– It was Maaretta Jaukkari who got me started on it. Margrete Gunnes, who lives in Vega, was also an enormous help. She took us



General view of the three sculptures.

© David Kinsella. Courtesy of Nordland Fylkeskommune.





The vertical form sculpture.

© Vegar Moen. Courtesy of Nordland Fylkeskommune.

down to the shore by the Atlantic Ocean. There lay the skeleton of an enormous sea creature. Stone Age people actually lived inside whales.

– Lived inside whales?

– They made houses from the whale skeletons, put up tents inside them. On this same trip we went deep sea fishing with leaded fish hooks. On the depths of the ocean floor the pressure is different from the surface. I was horrified when all the fish burst as they came to the surface. The seagulls helped themselves to the fish heads immediately. The triangular skull form is an aggressive shape. It might even remind one of those fish heads as they surfaced. The surface texture is partly rough, and it almost disappears into the nature that surrounds it – heathery outcrops.

– What about the other two elements?

– On our first visit here, we also climbed up the mountainside to look at some ancient settlements. This enabled me to understand Vega's history more clearly. I decided to bring in the forms I had seen as new elements in the piece. As new elements on the surface of the earth, and based upon my own ideas, I placed the different forms at a tensioned distance from each other, enhancing their impact upon the landscape. The square form is the assertive one. The aggressive, sharp triangular form plays its role by demanding this. The square form evens out the landscape

– I partly understand this, but what about the vertical stone?

– The stone that rises vertically is taller than the other, and symbolises mankind, but at the same time, one can see it is a "seide"; do you know what a "seide" is? It is a sacred stone. But sacred in a good way, which means both pagan and holy. It is a totem form. These forms are placed in the landscape in such a way as to enter into a dialogue with the nature that surrounds them. Nature becomes a part of the work, and the work a part of nature.



The triangular form sculpture.

© David Kinsella. Courtesy of Nordland Fylkeskommune.

– Tell me more about the working process.

– The stones come from Lofoten,² they were cut from the rock there; they were very like the cardboard models I had made beforehand, but I had to work on the scars left on the surfaces from the stone bores. The stones had been cut with a circular saw, roughly carved and then more finely worked with a chisel. I decided not to polish the surfaces.

– Why didn't you want to polish the surfaces?

– The surface had to be as natural as possible, so that the stones could participate in the landscape around them. The stones became objects produced both by man and by nature, and so they were naturally absorbed by their surroundings.

– I believe you also had a local workman to help you?

– We called him Friday. He was a jack-of-all-trades, and of enormous help. Our workplace was no stonemasons studio, but we had a hut there, so we could rest and get power for our tools.

The work was originally planned to be finished during the month of June, when the weather was most clement. During the physical phase of the work, the weather turned bad, and became unseasonably arctic.

– On Vega, it doesn't rain from the sky, as in other places in the world; the rain comes whipping in horizontally, so it's just like being in a cold, powerful shower and it's impossible to protect oneself from it. The cold arctic wind brings downpours of rain every five minutes. It's just as cold as in the winter.

The problems of a sculptor can sometimes remind one of an archeologist's problems. What right does modern man have to leave tracks and traces of his contemporary culture? What happens if this very trace violates the area's own system, its cultural heritage and the people who live there?

² Lofoten is about 300 km from the Vega archipelago.



A New Discussion sculptures.

© David Kinsella. Courtesy of Nordland Fylkeskommune.

– Vega is a treasure trove for those interested in the Stone Age. The whole area is sacred.

– It was not an easy task to work here, but it was a challenging and interesting one.

– Are you satisfied yourself?

– The dimensions of the pieces fit in. They are neither too big nor too small for the surrounding landscape, so I'm happy about the size.

– What about the relationship between the elements?

– That was changed by the fact that a new road was built, and something new happened to the entire sculpture when they were re-grouped in another constellation. The final result was an improvement as the separate elements came closer together, and this tightened up the whole piece.

Kärjäkivet is an independent online publishing project of thought and criticism of architecture that was born from an artistic research around the unbuilt Saivaara Monument designed in 1978 by the legendary Finnish artist Tapio Wirkkala for the Saivaara fjeld in Lapland. The publication has been achieving, not in form but in content, the concept of Kärjäkivet that Tapio Wirkkala wanted for the Saivaara Monument: the creation of a place where men of all races and colors can gather to think. In this sense, there is an online platform - www.karajakivet.com - where several invited authors are able to gather through small literary constructions produced by them, sharing their ideas about architecture, art and culture in general, in a sort of modern-day assembly.

Evoking the place that Tapio Wirkkala wanted to create at the top of the Saivaara fjeld, Kärjäkivet meant to be a place of slowness and introspection where to stop, "observe the landscape" that surrounds us and think.



KÄRJÄKIVET

Finnish word meaning “court stones” or “circle of stones”: places of judgment (originally iron age graves), where judgments were held and justice carried out, accordingly to the Finnish National Board of Antiquities.

In the ancient times, they were important places where the primitive leaders of the North got together in order to discuss and decide about common matters.

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